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ABSTRACT

Statistical profiles of Mexican American women workers and a narrative describing their role in trade unions illustrate the economic precariousness of this group and of women in general. Census and Labor Department reports document national labor trends from 1930-1980 with emphasis on the Southwest. Tables present information on occupational type, median income, and educational level for Mexican American, Anglo, Black, and American Indian women and for Mexican American and Anglo men. Among findings discussed are that: (1) Mexican American and American Indian women have the lowest median incomes in the Southwest; (2) Anglo and Mexican American men have higher median incomes than any group of women; and (3) women with more years of schooling have higher median incomes and employment rates. The overview of Mexican American women in industry and unions examines ethnic and sexual discrimination, gives examples of Mexican American women's labor militancy and analyzes the impact of mechanization, undocumented workers, and seasonal work. Discussion points out that women who must work to support their families may consider job security their top priority. The final topic is the role of Mexican American women as policy makers in two unions--United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA) and United Farm Workers. (JHZ)

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WORKING FOR WAGES:
MEXICAN WOMEN IN THE SOUTHWEST, 1930-1980

VICKI RUIZ

WORKING PAPER NO. 19

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VICKI RUIZ

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Vicki L. Ruiz is Director of the Institute of Oral History and Assistant Professor of History at the University of Texas at El Paso. She holds a Ph.D. from Stanford University. Currently she is completing a manuscript entitled Labor of Love: The UCAPAWA Moment. A study of Mexican women food processing workers in California, 1937-1950.

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WORKING FOR WAGES: MEXICAN WOMEN IN THE SOUTHWEST, 1930-1980

ABSTRACT

This paper presents both a statistical profile of Mexican women workers and a narrative examination of their relationship with trade unions. Using the 1980 census, as well as other materials, it compares occupational distribution, median incomes, and educational levels of Chicanas with those of Anglo, Black, and American Indian women. Further, comparison of the median earnings of ethnic and Anglo women with those of Mexican and Anglo men reveals significant gender disparities. These cross-cultural and cross-gender perspectives illuminate the socioeconomic vulnerability of Chicana workers in particular and women in general. An analysis of obstacles facing female Hispanic industrial operatives vividly illustrates their economic precariousness.

WORKING FOR WAGES: MEXICAN WOMEN IN THE SOUTHWEST, 1930-1980

In examining fifty years of the working experience of Mexican women, my purpose is twofold: 1) to delineate statistical information regarding Chicanal participation in the labor market and 2) to discuss in depth the particular problems facing this group of women workers. Gathering data from Labor Department reports, census materials, and secondary sources, I have used figures which represent national trends, as well as those which pertain strictly to the Southwest. In examining the following tables, one must keep in mind that over 18 million Hispanics live in the United States (Puerto Rico included) and that Mexicans constitute over two-thirds of this growing population. Half the U.S. Hispanics, furthermore, reside in two Southwestern states, California and Texas.[2] Thus, information based on a national sample can be used to ascertain Mexicans' employment and income in the Southwest.

The proportion and number of Mexican women working outside the home have increased dramatically since 1930. For instance, in 1930, Chicanas accounted for only 14.5 percent of all Mexican workers in the Southwest; by 1970, however, they constituted 33.2 percent of this Spanish-surnamed labor force. In 1981, 47.5 percent of all Hispanic women worked for wages. (The comparable rate of participation in the labor force for Anglo and Black women reached 52 percent and 53.2 percent, respectively.) Mexicanas have generally been employed in occupations ranging from domestic service to secretarial and sales positions.[3] Table I illuminates the occupational distribution for Mexican women vis-à-vis Mexican men in the Southwest from 1930 to 1980.

On the surface, Chicanas may appear to have experienced greater

TABLE I. OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION FOR MEXICANS IN THE SOUTHWEST, 1930-1980
(in percentages)

WOMEN

Occupational Group	Year 1930	1950	1970	1976	1980
White Collar	15.4	33.1	43.9	44.1	48.8
Professional/ Technical	2.9	4.6	7.6	6.0	8.4
Managerial/ Proprietor	2.4	3.9	2.4	3.2	4.2
Clerical/ Sales	10.1	24.6	33.9	34.9	36.2
Blue Collar	25.3	30.9	26.8	27.0	25.6
Skilled (Craft)	0.6	1.4	2.2	3.0	4.2
Semi-Skilled (Operatives)	21.9	28.1	23.1	22.3	17.2
Unskilled (Laborers)	2.8	1.4	1.5	1.7	4.2
Service	38.4	27.8	26.2	26.3	22.7
Farm	20.7	6.5	3.1	2.6	2.9
Farm Managers	1.0	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.1
Farm Workers	19.7	6.2	3.0	2.5	2.8

MEN

Occupational Group	Year 1930	1950	1970	1976	1980
White Collar	7.1	13.1	22.1	18.1	21.7
Professional/ Technical	0.9	2.2	6.4	5.5	5.6
Managerial/ Proprietor	2.8	4.4	5.2	5.6	5.2
Clerical/ Sales	3.4	6.5	10.5	7.0	10.9
Blue Collar	44.1	50.8	58.3	62.4	58.0
Skilled (Craft)	6.8	13.1	20.8	19.1	23.0
Semi-Skilled (Operatives)	9.1	19.0	25.4	29.0	23.2

TABLE I. OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION FOR MEXICANS IN THE SOUTHWEST, 1930-1980 (continued)

	MEN				
	Year				
Occupational Group	1930	1950	1970	1976	1980
Unskilled (Laborers)	28.2	18.7	12.1	14.3	11.8
Service	4.0	6.3	10.5	10.9	10.9
Farm	44.9	29.8	9.0	8.4	9.4
Farm Managers	9.8	5.1	0.9	0.6	1.6
Farm Workers	35.1	24.7	8.1	7.8	7.8

Sources: Mario Barrera, Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), pp. 313, 151); U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Colorado, 1980; U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Arizona, 1980; U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, New Mexico, 1980; U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, California, 1980; U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Texas, 1980.

economic mobility than their brothers. The majority of these white-collar workers are clustered in clerical and sales positions, however. If one analyzes professional and administrative employment of both Mexican men and women, a somewhat different picture emerges. In 1976, for example, 9.2 percent of Mexicana workers held professional or managerial posts compared to 11.1 percent of Mexicanos. Thus, in terms of "status" white-collar occupations, Chicanos and Chicanas have experienced similar rates of mobility, although from 1976 to 1980 Mexican women have made significant inroads into these sectors.

The figures dealing with blue-collar employment demonstrate that Chicanos (as a group) have always been a working-class people. Over 58 percent of Mexican men and 25 percent of Mexican women in 1980 performed industrial labor. While 23 percent of Chicano factory employees held skilled or supervisory jobs, however, only 4 percent of their Chicana co-workers had similar positions. Mexican women, furthermore, were twice as likely to perform service-related duties.

In the agricultural sector, the proportion of Mexicana farm laborers has declined significantly since 1930 (from 19.5 percent in 1930 to 2.8 percent in 1980). The number of Chicanos employed in agriculture has also declined over the last fifty years, mainly because of increased mechanization and reliance on undocumented workers. Of those Mexican workers accounted for by the census, men were almost three times more prevalent in field work than women.

During the past five decades, then, the occupational distribution of Mexicanas has shifted. Although concentrated primarily in clerical and sales positions, Chicanas are gradually becoming more visible in technical and administrative professions. Interestingly, the figures for Mexicana

industrial workers have varied only slightly from 1930 to 1980; however, the proportion of these women employed in service jobs has declined steadily.

Data about occupational distribution illuminate only a portion of the economic roles of Mexican women. Research is needed to profile their backgrounds. For example, are Chicana clerical employees typically second or third generation? Are they bilingual or monolingual (in Spanish or in English)? Do they have a high school or a college education? Where did they attend school (public or private, in the U.S. or Mexico)? What is their typical marital status? How many children do they have, of what ages? Economic trends should also be examined. In 1930, for instance, only 10.1 percent of Mexican women held clerical or sales jobs, but by 1950, 24.6 percent of Mexicanas were employed in these lower white-collar occupations. Did the number of clerical and sales positions expand tremendously, so that Chicanas had greater opportunity in 1950 than in 1930? What impact did World War II have on this development? Or did an easing of prejudicial attitudes occur which facilitated the incorporation of Mexicanas into the lower white-collar labor market? Did a growing Hispanic population in the United States and increased corporate dealings with Latin America necessitate the hiring of bilingual personnel? Pursuing these types of questions for each occupational category can lead to a greater understanding of Mexicana ecoromic participation.

Another fruitful line of inquiry lies in analyzing Chicana median incomes in relation to those of Mexican men, as well as to the earnings of other women. Do Mexicanas earn less than their brothers? Are their wages similar to those garnered by Anglo, Black, and American Indian women? Table II provides a comparison of median incomes according to gender, ethnicity, and race in 1980 for the Southwest.

TABLE II. A COMPARISON OF MEDIAN INCOMES OF FULL-TIME WORKERS 15 YEARS AND OVER ACCORDING TO GENDER, ETHNICITY, AND RACE IN THE SOUTHWEST, 1980

MEDIAN INCOMES
(in dollars)

	Colorado	Arizona	New Mexico	California	Texas
Anglo Men	18,799	18,280	18,206	20,263	19,280
Mexican Men	14,862	13,963	12,444	12,929	11,566
Anglo Women	11,081	9,483	10,047	12,247	10,586
Black Women	10,674	9,154	8,656	11,584	8,503
Mexican Women	9,254	8,602	8,012	9,154	7,750
Amer. Ind. Women	8,825	8,473	8,146	10,997	9,737

MEDIAN INCOMES AS PERCENTAGES OF TOTAL ANGLO MALE MEDIAN INCOME

	Colorado	Arizona	New Mexico	California	Texas
Mexican Men	79.1	76.4	68.4	61.7	60.0
Anglo Women	58.9	51.9	55.2	54.9	58.4
Black Women	56.8	50.1	47.5	44.1	55.2
Mexican Women	49.2	47.1	44.0	40.2	43.7
Amer. Ind. Women	46.9	46.4	44.7	50.5	52.4

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Colorado, 1980; U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Arizona, 1980; U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, New Mexico, 1980; U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, California, 1980; U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Texas, 1980.

Although Chicanos had lower salaries on the average than Anglo men, their median incomes were greater than those of women regardless of nationality or race. Anglo and Black women, however, had higher earnings than their Mexican and American Indian sisters, the latter two groups recording strikingly similar annual wages. An exception occurred in Texas, where American Indians recorded higher earnings than either their Black or Chicana counterparts. Apparently, then, gender is a more important variable than minority status in determining income. Yet among women, Chicanas and American Indians usually occupy the lowest rung on the socioeconomic ladder. In Texas and California, where the majority of Mexican women live, they are at the bottom of the median income scale.

An examination of the educational levels attained by Anglo, Black, and Mexican women may account for discrepancies in annual incomes. Have Anglo and Black women received more years of formal education than their Chicana sisters? In addition, what impact has education had in determining the financial status of Mexican men? Table III delineates years of school completed by U.S. workers in 1980 along sexual, ethnic, and racial lines.

Anglo and Black women, on the whole, have achieved higher levels of education than Mexican women. In fact, almost one-half of Chicana workers have only an elementary school background, compared to 10 and 19 percent of Anglos and Black, respectively. Only 3 percent of Mexicanas in the labor force, moreover, have graduated from college, compared to 17 percent of their Anglo and 10 percent of their Black sisters. Thus, education seems to be a significant determinant of income potential among women. Although Mexican men, as a group, have less formal schooling than Anglo or Black women, they appear to achieve higher earnings in the five Southwestern states surveyed in Table II. Although a greater proportion of Chicanas

TABLE III. YEARS OF SCHOOL COMPLETED BY SELECTED GROUPS OF SOUTHWESTERN WORKERS 25 YEARS AND OLDER, 1980
(in percentages)

Years of School Completed	Anglo Women	Black Women	Mexican Women	Mexican Men
Elementary (8 yrs. or less)	10.0	18.6	48.7	46.3
High School (1-3 yrs.)	14.2	20.2	16.0	15.0
(4 yrs.)	37.2	31.3	23.2	20.4
College (1-3 yrs.)	21.8	19.9	8.7	12.3
(4 yrs. or more)	16.8	10.0	3.4	6.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Colorado, 1980; U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Arizona, 1980; U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, New Mexico, 1980; U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, California, 1980; U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Texas, 1980.

graduated from high school, Chicanos were more likely to obtain college degrees. An analysis of the data in Tables II and III reveals a significant gender gap that cannot be explained by a divergence in education.

To complement an examination of the levels of education and income of Mexicana workers, scrutiny of the employment distribution of women by race and nationality is necessary. Are Chicanas more likely to be clustered in lower status occupations than Black or Anglo women, or are they simply paid less for comparable labor? Table IV illustrates the composition of the female labor force for 1980.

The findings on income, schooling, and occupational distribution heighten speculation. Perhaps because they had more educational advantages, Anglo and Black women in 1980 were almost twice as likely as Chicanas to hold professional or technical jobs. Yet if education seems the only factor, why was the proportion of Anglo women in managerial posts double that of both their Black and Mexican sisters? Furthermore, what accounted for the greater proportion of Black women in the service sector, especially when one takes into consideration that, in the Southwest, the income of Black women appears substantially higher than that of Mexicanas? Do the data indicate that Blacks received higher wages for their labor than Chicanas? An in-depth regional or urban study of women workers from a cross-cultural perspective would shed light on the precise impact of gender, race, and ethnicity in determining economic roles.

Another area of inquiry explores the relationship between labor force participation and education. Are Mexicanas more likely to be working outside the home if they have high school or college training? Can this correlation also apply to Anglo and Black women? What impact does level of education have on unemployment rates? Furthermore, do unemployment figures

TABLE IV. OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF WOMEN WORKERS IN THE SOUTHWEST BY RACE AND ETHNICITY, 1980
(in percentages)

Occupational Group	Anglo	Black	Mexican
White Collar	76.6	58.2	48.6
Professional/ Technical	18.5	15.1	8.4
Managerial Proprietor	10.3	5.7	4.2
Sales/ Clerical	47.8	37.4	36.2
Blue Collar	8.0	13.1	25.6
Skilled (Craft)	2.3	2.7	4.2
Semi-skilled (Operatives)	4.4	8.4	17.2
Unskilled (Laborers)	1.3	2.0	4.2
Service	14.6	28.4	22.7
Farm	0.8	0.3	2.9
Farm Managers	0.3	0.05	0.1
Farm Workers	0.5	0.25	2.8

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Colorado, 1980; U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Arizona, 1980; U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, New Mexico, 1980; U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, California, 1980; U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Texas, 1980.

for women differ along ethnic and racial lines? Table V offers insightful information.

With each increment in formal education, participation in the labor force in 1981 rose for all three groups, accompanied (generally) by a commensurate decline in unemployment. For example, Hispanic women with three years of high school had an employment level of 41.2 percent and an unemployment rate of 17.1 percent, compared to figures of 69.6 percent and 2.9 percent, respectively, for Hispanic college graduates. Women with Spanish surnames completing eight years of school or less were one-third more likely than their Anglo counterparts to be employed outside the home. Probably these people joined the labor market out of economic necessity and worked for low wages in various blue-collar positions. One should note also that in almost every category Blacks had the highest unemployment levels, and in every instance Anglos had the lowest.

The preceding tables indicate the importance of education in relation to employment. Apparently, the more formal education a woman acquires regardless of her ethnicity, the greater the likelihood of outside employment. One cannot assume, however, that working for wages ensures economic mobility. Although certain types of training increase available opportunities and lead to financial security, one should not grandiosely suggest that advanced schooling per se guarantees economic stability. Education is not a panacea, but its degree and character do significantly influence the lives of working women.

From a different angle, the family structure of Southwestern workers may also influence median annual income. For example, do the earnings of Mexican married-couple households exceed those of Anglo families with no husband present? To what extent do nationality and race affect the wage-

TABLE V. LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN WORKERS, 16 YEARS AND OVER, ACCORDING TO EDUCATION, ETHNICITY, AND RACE, 1981

RATE OF EMPLOYMENT

Years of School Completed	Anglo Women	Black Women	Hispanic Women
Elementary (8 yrs. or less)	21.2	24.3	33.1
High School (1-3 yrs. or less)	40.7	42.3	41.2
(4 yrs.)	56.9	65.9	60.0
College (1-3 yrs.)	59.8	67.9	66.6
(4 yrs. or more)	67.2	81.4	69.6

RATE OF EMPLOYMENT

Years of School Completed	Anglo Women	Black Women	Hispanic Women
Elementary (8 yrs. or less)	9.8	12.1	14.5
High School (1-3 yrs.)	11.6	2 .2	17.5
(4 yrs.)	5.5	13.2	7.2
College (1-3 yrs.)	4.3	10.4	7.5
(4 yrs. or more)	2.4	3.3	2.9

Note: Data are based on a national sample of Anglo, Black, and Hispanic women.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Educational Attainment of Workers, 1981 (Bulletin No. 2159, January 1983).

generating potential of female-headed families? Table VI outlines median income for Anglo, Black, Mexican, and American Indian families in the Southwest during 1980.

In every instance, female-headed households were at a financial disadvantage vis-à-vis other families. Even the income of Anglo single-parent units did not match that of traditional two-parent Mexican and American Indian families. Although these Anglo households fared better than those headed by other women, the standard of living of all female-headed families with children under six was, in general, well below the poverty line. Thus, gender disparities in wages translated into a marginal existence for households with women as the sole breadwinners.

Further research is needed to document fully the comparative economic roles of Anglo, Black, Mexican, and American Indian women in the Southwest. The preceding statistical profile shows, however, that Chicana workers as a group occupy one of the lowest sectors in the socioeconomic hierarchy. Ethnicity compounds the barriers associated with sexual discrimination in education and employment opportunities. For Mexican women with blue-collar jobs, class is an additional consideration. Mexicana industrial operatives face the triple obstacles of gender, nationality, and class. The following section delineates the particular problems of these women, especially with regard to trade union organization.

Chicana industrial workers in the Southwest have typically found employment in garment and food-processing firms. The wage scales in these industries have reinforced the economic vulnerability of Mexicanas. For example, typing a business letter and sewing a pair of slacks both require certain degrees of manual dexterity and skill. Clerical work, however, is perceived as a skilled lower white-collar occupation, whereas garment labor is classified as an unskilled blue-collar job. Not only is the nature of

TABLE VI. MEDIAN INCOME FOR FAMILIES IN FIVE SOUTHWESTERN STATES, 1980
(in dollars)

TWO-PARENT AND FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS					
	Colorado	Arizona	New Mexico	California	Texas
Anglo					
two-parent	23,580	21,392	21,310	25,482	23,391
female-headed	11,922	11,763	10,632	12,574	12,216
Black					
two-parent	20,185	17,441	15,671	20,749	17,063
female-headed	8,311	7,357	4,842	8,688	7,415
Mexican					
two-parent	17,473	16,952	14,840	17,412	14,563
female-headed	6,364	7,785	6,395	8,486	6,845
Amer. Indian					
two-parent	18,433	12,236	12,912	20,545	20,229
female-headed	7,327	6,751	6,669	8,649	10,077

FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN UNDER 6					
	Colorado	Arizona	New Mexico	California	Texas
Anglo	6,950	7,434	5,852	6,610	8,232
Black	4,632	5,038	3,241	5,722	5,230
Mexican	4,372	4,889	4,067	5,761	4,158
Amer. Indian	5,071	5,038	5,164	5,790	5,707

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Colorado, 1980; U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Arizona, 1980; U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, New Mexico, 1980; U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, California, 1980; U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Texas, 1980.

apparel and cannery work undervalued, but the labor of the women executing these tasks is often misprized.

Moreover, ethnic and sexual discrimination against Mexicana industrial workers on the part of management frequently becomes translated into low wages. Employers often refuse to pay higher wages because they perceive their labor force as unworthy of such remuneration. Negative attitudes toward Chicana labor justify and reinforce subsistence wage levels. In the textile firms of west Texas and southern New Mexico, for example, supervisors still routinely refer to Chicana operatives as "stupid Mexicans" or "Mexican sluts."[4] Inflammatory slurs by management not only damage the self-esteem of these women but are often used to rationalize the low monetary value placed on their labor.

Mexicanas in the United States have a rich history of labor militancy, yet their efforts frequently have failed to result in concrete gains. Retaliation by employers, mechanization, proximity to the U.S.-Mexican border, and the seasonal nature of Chicana employment probably pose the greatest hurdles to organization. For example, in 1978, Mexicana garment workers at the Spring City Knitting Company in Deming, New Mexico, joined the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) and won a National Labor Relations Board representation election. Management, however, decided to close the Deming plant rather than pay union wages. As a result, the workers, flushed with victory, suddenly faced unemployment.[5] Unless the move is economically prohibitive, Southwestern manufacturers, both large and small, have preferred to relocate their operations in the face of labor activism.

Mechanization has also contributed to the obstacles that Mexican women confront in their efforts to unionize. Although most industries that hire

Chicanas are still labor-intensive, technological advancements used by management to increase productivity have often meant unemployment for their operatives. For instance, from 1937 to 1950, Mexicana pecan shellers of San Antonio, under the banner of the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA), achieved significant gains in their wages and working conditions. Not to be outdone, management reacted to unionization by installing new equipment to perform most of the manual tasks. Consequently, employment in the San Antonio pecan plants fell from 10,000 workers in 1938 to 350 in 1950. Generally speaking, given the availability of resources for mechanization, manufacturers have preferred machines to unions--an attitude gaining currency among Southwestern growers.[6]

Another hurdle to unionization which has confronted Chicanas living near the U.S.-Mexican border has been the surplus labor pool. Often when Mexican women workers stage a walk-out, management simply hires other Mexicanas (both U.S. and Mexican citizens) to replace the strikers. Because of traditionally high rates of unemployment for these women on both sides of the border, Mexicana "scabs" eagerly accept the positions vacated by their sisters.[7]

Obviously, central to the issue of the surplus labor pool is the undocumented worker. For understandable reasons, Mexicanas sin papeles are often fearful of joining a union. Growers and labor contractors, for example, notify the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) of the whereabouts of undocumented members of the United Farm Workers. Moreover, INS officials have raided California canneries, ostensibly as part of legitimate enforcement efforts, for purposes that can only be described as harassment of Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans alike. Certainly, the role of Mexicanas sin papeles remains a critical element for Chicanas

to consider in unionization efforts, for success may ultimately depend upon neutralizing employers' use of undocumented workers to undercut organizational drives and incorporating these Mexican citizens into the union structure.8

In the garment and food-processing plants of the Southwest, the seasonal nature of Chicana employment has further hampered union campaigns. Many Mexicana operatives are hired as temporary help during peak periods or "seasons." This seasonal employment limits the earning power of these women. In addition, Chicanas are generally unable to achieve the seniority necessary for promotion to higher paying supervisory posts. The seniority situation for many Mexicana operatives is so poor that often the women must compete with new applicants to retain their positions for the following season. Such tenuousness has impeded unionization, for employers can simply deny future jobs to activist Chicanas.9 Thus, various elements, ranging from plant closures to mechanization to the surplus labor pool, have hindered the development of trade unions among Mexicana laborers in the Southwest.

Another crucial factor to consider is the relationship between trade unions and their Chicana constituents. Although Mexican women have on occasion effectively controlled union locals, the degree of Chicana rank-and-file participation has depended mostly on the attitudes of labor professionals toward their Mexican members. Officials of conventional trade unions, purportedly acting on behalf of their respective constituency, have many times reinforced ethnic and sexual discrimination. They have often perceived Mexican women workers in one of two ways: as members to be ignored or as objects to be manipulated. For example, in the textile industry, the ILGWU and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers (ACW) have

rarely offered their Chicana rank and file any semblance of participation in union affairs.[10]

A case in point is the Farah strike. In 1972, Mexicana garment workers at the Farah plants in El Paso, Texas, walked out over issues of pay, job security, health, and pension. The women faced formidable obstacles since Farah, the largest private employer in El Paso, wielded considerable political and economic clout in the local community. Chicana workers affiliated with the ACW and initiated a national boycott of Farah slacks and suits. The boycott provided the key to the workers' successful settlement of the strike, which included wage increases and recognition of the local. Just a few months later, however, a number of Mexicana strike activists were fired for failing to meet inflated production quotas; and the union leadership blithely refused to generate any grievance procedures to protect and retain these women.[11]

Chicanas have not fared well in their affiliation with mainstream labor unions despite the fact that they have contributed much of the people power, perseverance, and activism essential for successful organization. Typically, Chicanas have been denied any meaningful voice in the affairs of the local they had labored so valiantly to build. Clearly, the predominantly white male leaders of traditional labor organizations have demonstrated their reluctance to involve women, especially Mexicanas, in the decision-making processes of union leadership. Time and time again, Chicanas have encountered the dual oppression of ethnic and sexual subordination which has effectively thwarted any active involvement in union policy-making on the local as well as the national level.

Specific factors explaining the exclusion of Chicana workers in leadership roles may be traced to the nature of conventional trade unions and the attitudes toward ethnicity and gender held by the men who control the

unions. Even when the vast majority of the rank-and-file membership is Mexicana, union professionals, generally male, are appointed to "manage" the affairs of these locals. Implicit in this paternalistic mind-set is the notion that Mexican women lack the intelligence and skill necessary to conduct day-to-day union dealings. In particular, union-hired business agents, the officials most frequently in contact with local members and management, are usually Anglo, male, and middle-class. Typical examples are Teamster-affiliated unions in California canneries, wherein Mexicanas compose the majority of the labor force yet business agents have always been Anglo, male, and college-educated. These men, who have little in common with the rank and file, display attitudes characteristic of management. With no genuine commitment to local members, they view their positions as jobs, nothing more. Business agents perceive their duties as maintaining the financial solvency of the local through systematic collection of dues and fees and avoiding lengthy labor disputes that would drain union coffers. As financial managers, these men give relatively low priority to workers' rights and grievances. As in the past, they tend to align themselves with management, the result being the denial of a viable voice for Mexicanas in union decision-making. Teamster representatives in California food-processing firms have consistently enforced employer-minded policies and stubbornly resisted worker involvement in local affairs.12

In contrast to their marginality in mainstream unions, Chicana rank-and-file workers have vigorously taken part in the policy-making of two major unions, one of which is a relatively forgotten leftist union extant during the 1930s and 1940s; the other, nationally known, continues on a limited basis. The United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA) and the United Farm Workers (UFW) have pro-

vided ample opportunities for extensive Mexicana involvement and leadership. Under UCAPAWA, Mexicana food-processing operatives in California and Texas substantially improved their wages and working conditions. These women also held various local elective posts from president to shop steward. When the Teamsters signed sweetheart contracts with California canners, the women of UCAPAWA struggled courageously against Teamster authority, but were rewarded with unemployment for their efforts.[13]

One of the primary aims of the UFW has been the involvement of every family member in union affairs. Not surprisingly, then, the role of women in organizational and leadership positions has been critical. Chicanas have been well represented at the leadership and service levels of the union. Mexican women, to a large extent, operate the service center, health clinic, huelga school, day nursery, and legal department. Mexicana organizers work side by side with men, and Dolores Huerta, vice-president of the UFW, is a powerful advocate for campesina rights at the union's top echelon.[14] Thus, because of the presence of Mexicanas on all rungs of the union's hierarchy, the UFW leadership has not been as mired in paternalistic attitudes and practices as have traditional trade unions.

Unfortunately, enlightened labor leadership has not resulted in any institutionalized gains for Chicana workers. UCAPAWA, perhaps the best example of successful participation of Mexicanas in union affairs, has long since faded from the American labor movement. Although the UFW still functions, it has encounted severe setbacks and is struggling.[15]

On an optimistic note, the development of rank-and-file caucuses within conservative labor organizations provides new leverage for worker input. For the past sixteen years, el Comité De Trabajadores De Canería, a rank-and-file caucus within Teamster cannery locals in San Jose and Sacramento, California, has effected some democratic reforms; it currently operates two

service centers offering an array of programs. This group has won a federal lawsuit against employers for discriminating against Mexican workers, particularly women, in promotion decisions and has successfully elected several reform candidates to union posts. When the Comité has nominated Chicanas for elective positions, however, Teamster officials have disqualified them on the grounds that they did not meet certain (but unspecified) requirements. Under pressure from the Comité, Teamster leaders in San Jose have been forced to conduct union meetings in both English and Spanish, as they had not done in the past, even though before the Chicano caucus the local consisted of a majority of non-English-speaking members. This organization offers hope as it pioneers new strategies in making mainstream labor groups more responsive to their Mexicana constituency.[16]

Employer retaliation, ethnic and sexual discrimination, co-optation by conservative unions, and the economic vulnerability of Mexican women, however, have served as formidable hurdles to Chicanas' control over their work lives. Traditional unions have often given Mexican women the initial financial and organizational support needed to build a strong local; but then labor professionals took charge of union affairs, usually to the detriment of the workers. Consequently, Mexicana union members generally have faced two struggles: with the employer and with the union.

From the preceding examination, one can see that life for Chicana industrial workers is fraught with obstacles and uncertainties. Often out of desperation, they labor for low wages under unsanitary, if not hazardous, conditions. These Mexican women, when pushed by intolerable work situations, prove themselves tenacious union activists. Some women, however, recognizing the limits of their education and employment

background, value job security above all other considerations. Former Farah striker Elsa Chávez has poignantly described the mind-set of these Mexican apparel operatives:

> A lot of them couldn't even read or write and they were so scared to lose their jobs because they didn't know how to work at another place. They didn't know how to look for a job, so they were really scared. They just wanted to stay there at Farah. And the same thing happened...at Mann Manufacturing. At Mann..., I was working there after I had lost my job at Farah--one day, I went over and there were some ladies crying and I asked them why. And some of them had worked their whole lives at the same factory, at the same place, at the same machine. They did not know how to do anything else. And when Mann sold the factory to Billy The Kid, they were all afraid that they were going to be fired because they were so old, and they did not know how to go look for a job.[17]

The economic vulnerability of Mexican women workers remains the primary barrier to improved wages and conditions. In the Southwest, Chicanas as a group occupy one of the lowest notches on the socioeconomic scale. As Mexicana activist Angela Barcena has aptly explained,

> La mayoría de las mujeres en las fabricas, la mayoría necessitan el trabajo para ayudar su esposo a mantener la familia o son las jefes de familia. Son las que mantienen su familia, son solas, son divorciadas. Así es que...la mujer han sido muy suspectible a la explotación--la mujer Mexicana.[18]

NOTES

[1]The terms Chicano(-a) and Mexican or Mexicano(-a) are used interchangeably to denote persons of either Mexican birth or Mexican descent living in the United States. Hispanic designates all persons of Latin American heritage.

[2]Carlos E. Arce, "Report to the Network," La Red/The Net (Newsletter of the National Chicano Council on Higher Education), June 1983, 1, 13-14.

[3]Mario Barrera, Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), pp. 95, 131, 137; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Marital and Family Patterns of Workers: An Update (Bulletin No. 2163, May 1983).

[4]Vicki L. Ruíz, "UCAPAWA, Chicanas, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1937-1950," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1982), pp. 41-42, 74; Interview with Angela Bárcena, 2 August 1979, conducted by Oscar Martínez, Mario Galdos, and Virgilio Sánchez, on file at the Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

[5]Barcena Interview; Interview with Esperanza Aguilar, 30 August 1979, conducted by Sarah John, on file at the Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

[6]Rodolfo Acuña, Occupied America: A History of Chicanos, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), pp. 234-236; Interview with Luisa Moreno, 27 July 1978, conducted by Vicki Ruíz; UCAPAWA News, September-October 1940; UCAPAWA News, 28 May 1942; Robert Garland Landolt, "The Mexican-American Workers of San Antonio, Texas" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas, 1965), pp. 228-235; Adela de la Torre, "Causes and Effects of Mechanization in Agriculture," paper given at the 9th Annual Meeting of the National Association for Chicano Studies, 2-4 April 1981, Riverside, California; Jacques Levy, Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1975), p. 75; Carey McWilliams, Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California (Boston: Little, Brown, 1953; reprinted by Peregrine Press, Santa Barbara, California, 1971), pp. xx-xxi.

[7]Mario T. García, Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880-1920 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 99; Ernesto Galarza, Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story (Charlotte: McNally and Loftin, Publishers, 1964), pp. 29-33; Laurie Coyle, Gail Hershatter, and Emily Honig, "Women at Farah: An Unfinished Story," in Mexican Women in the United States: Struggles Past and Present, Magdalena Mora and Adelaida R. Del Castillo, eds. (Occasional Paper No. 2) (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Publications, 1980), p. 129.

[8]Interview with Ernest Moreno, 10 January 1983, conducted by Vicki Ruíz; Interview with Andy Lucero, 29 August 1983, conducted by Vicki Ruíz; Funding Proposal submitted to the Campaign for Human Development by el Comité De Trabajadores De Caneria De San Jose, 31 January 1978.

[9]Comité Funding Proposal; The Cannery Worker, June 1977; The Cannery

Worker, December 1976; Alania v. California Processors, Inc., et. al., 13 FEP Cases 720; Interview with Paulina Villanueva, 17 June 1981, conducted by Vicki Ruíz; Interview with Pat Macias, 8 June 1981, conducted by Vicki Ruíz.

[10]Douglas Monroy, "La Costura En Los Angeles, 1933-1939: The ILGWU and The Politics of Domination," in Mexican Women in the United States: Struggles Past and Present, pp. 174-176; Landolt, "Mexican-American," pp. 176, 179, 182; Coyle, Hershatter, and Honig, "Women at Farah," pp. 136-143; Interview with Elsa Chávez, 19 April 1983, conducted by Vicki Ruíz. Note: Elsa Chávez is a pseudonym used at the person's request.

[11]Coyle, Hershatter, and Honig, "Women at Farah," pp. 117-121, 125-131, 136-143.

[12]Interview with Richard Benevento, 25 July 1978, conducted by Peter Woodward Philips; Peter Woodward Philips, "Towards a Historical Theory of Wage Structures: The Evolution of Wages in the California Canneries--1870 to the Present" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1980), pp. 266, 304-307, 311-312; The Cannery Worker, December 1976; CWC News, August 1980; Lucero Interview.

[13]Ruíz, "UCAPAWA, Chicanas," pp. 131-138, 248-249, 193-194, 197-199, 162-163, 228-229; Interview with Carmen Bernal Escobar, 11 February 1979, conducted by Vicki Ruíz; UCAPAWA News, 15 July 1942.

[14]Barbara Baer and Glenna Matthews, "The Women of the Boycott," in America's Working Women: A Documentary History - 1600 to the Present, Rosalyn Baxandall, Linda Gordon, and Susan Reverly, eds. (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), pp. 364-372; Joan London and Henry Anderson, So Shall Ye Reap: The Story of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Workers (New York: Apollo Editions, 1971), p. 181; Peter Matthiessen, Sal Si Puedes: Cesar Chavez and the New American Revolution (New York: Delta Books, 1969), p. 283; Philip S. Foner, Women and the American Labor Movement from World War I to the Present (New York: The Free Press, 1980), pp. 461-462; Ernest Moreno Interview; Interview with Graciela Martinez Moreno, 10 January 1983, conducted by Vicki Ruíz.

[15]Ruíz, "UCAPAWA, Chicanas," p. 246; Newsweek, 14 December 1981; Margarita Arce Dacierdo, "The Struggle Within: Mediating Conflict in California Fields" (Chicano Political Economy Collective Working Paper Series No. 106) (Berkeley: Institute for the Study of Social Change, University of California, 1980), pp. 10-13, 25-27.

[16]Comité Funding Proposal; Alania v. California Processors, Inc., et.al., 13 FEP Cases 720; Lucero Interview; Villanueva Interview; Macias Interview; San Jose News, 2 October 1975; People's World, 25 October 1975; CWC News, August 1980; Philips, "Towards a Historical Theory," pp. 307-308; The Cannery Worker, June 1977.

[17]Chávez Interview.

[18]Barcena Interview.